

## SCR 30 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

### Senate Committee On Rules

---

**Prepared By:** Cherie Stone, LPRO Analyst

**Meeting Dates:** 5/22

---

#### **WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:**

Honors members of 555th "Triple Nickles" Parachute Infantry Battalion for their pioneering achievements and service to this country and state.

#### **ISSUES DISCUSSED:**

#### **EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:**

#### **BACKGROUND:**

Officially activated on December 30, 1943, the 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion was the first African-American paratrooper unit in the United States Army. Nicknamed "Triple Nickles", the unit's symbol was three buffalo nickles formed into a triangle, in recognition of the numeral 5 and the buffalo soldiers of the 92nd Infantry Division. Sergeant Walter Morris, who recognized the affect the segregation of the United States Military was having on African-American soldiers, began to lead men in his unit in training similar to that of official paratroopers in an effort to boost the morale of African-American soldiers who felt undervalued and underutilized. Subsequently, the commanding general of the paratrooper school, General Ridgely Gaither, took notice of the training activity and rewarded Sergeant Morris' initiative by making him First Sergeant of a newly formed platoon comprised solely of African-American paratroopers. The initial training program at Fort Benning included 20 men, 17 of which earned the "silver wings" of the paratrooper badge, and later six more officers would join and complete the training. The success of the platoon made it possible for the army to call for enough African-American volunteers to form an official company. Responses to the call were overwhelming and lead the army to increase the size of the Triple Nickles to a battalion of more than 400 men at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Sergent Morris was named as Battalion Adjutant.

In 1945 the Triple Nickles received an opportunity to show their abilities as they were ordered to participate in a secret mission named Operation Firefly which was later revealed to be a firefighting effort aimed at defending the west cost from Japanese incendiary balloons. In addition, Operation Firefly was intended to keep the press from disclosing use of the balloons in order to convince the Japanese military that the balloons had been ineffective. When they arrived at Pendleton Field in Oregon, the men of the battalion learned they would be making the transition from combat paratroopers to smoke jumpers, and would be assigned to parachute from planes to fight fires ignited by the incendiary balloons and to deactivate any balloons that had not exploded. The men of the Triple Nickles committed themselves fully to their new training, used their ingenuity to overcome ill-suited and inadequate equipment and became the first African-American smoke jumpers. The Triple Nickles, assigned to bases in Pendleton, Oregon and Chico Air Base in California, were called upon to defend the forests of at least six western states, fight more than 30 large fires, and dispose of bombs.

The men of the Triple Nickles became the first African-American unit to be integrated into an American combat division in 1947, when the 555th Parachute Parachute Battalion was deactivated and the men of were transferred into the 3rd Battalion, 505th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division. By the time President Harry Truman desegregated the military by signing Executive Order 9981, members of the Triple Nickles had already been integrated for seven months and helped forge a path to integration. The men of the Triple Nickles and their incredible contributions will be honored with a historical marker at the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base Museum in Cave Junction, Oregon in June of 2017.

**SCR 30 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY**

Senate Concurrent Resolution 30 honors the members of the 555th "Triple Nickles" Parachute Infantry Battalion for their pioneering achievements and their service to their country and this state.